

From 1995 to 1997, we completed some field surveys to determine the ranges of introduced ungulates. We also compiled all literature and unpublished information from the local Wildlife Department to determine the past and current distribution and status of *Axis axis* and other exotic ungulates in Buenos Aires province.

In the study area, the species distribution is closely associated with *Celtis tala* forests (Rio de La Plata estuarine area), and with the two mountain chains (Tandilia and Ventania systems) in the province.

We confirmed chital occurrence in Magdalena, Chascomus, Castelli, Tornquist, Bahia Blanca, Gral. Lavalle and Berisso (Galliari *et al.* 1991) and also in General Pueyrredon and Balcarce departments (Navas 1987). Additionally, there have been new records for the species at General Belgrano, General Madariaga,

Tordillo, Tandil, Coronel Suarez, Guamini and Dolores (Fig. 1).

It is necessary to delineate distribution to study the biology and assess the impact of chital on local flora, particularly the indigenous *tala* (*Celtis tala*) forests and pampas grasslands.

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2. TAKIN *BUDORCAS TAXICOLOR* AT MENLA RESERVE FOREST (3,050 M), EAST SIKKIM: A WESTWARD RANGE EXTENSION AND OBSERVATIONS OF UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR

The Mishmi takin *Budorcas taxicolor* Hodgson was finally sighted in Sikkim in June 1999. For decades there were rumours of a solitary, large mammal locally called 'Tarkin' by the Lachungpa tribals of north Sikkim.

In recent times, the animal was first reported from Lema (c. 2,400 m) in Lachung, north Sikkim in September 1976. In May-June 1984, a villager Mr. Jorgay Lachungpa told me that an animal called 'Tarkin' occasionally comes across the Tembawa ridge adjoining Dombang valley, probably from the Chumbi valley to the Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary area (c. 3,400 m), north Sikkim.

During the All India Tiger Census, December 1993, conducted by Mr. C. Lachungpa Divisional Forest Officer (Wildlife) of the Department of Forests, Environment and Wildlife, he sighted a large herbivorous animal from afar in a dense area of Menmoitso Reserve Forest (c. 2,500 m) in east Sikkim. His photograph, taken with a normal lens, showed vaguely a large animal like a bear or yak, but due to the distance it was not possible to identify it. It was suspected to be either a gaur *Bos gaurus* or Sikkim stag (Shou) *Cervus elaphus wallichi* Cuvier, possibly strayed over from Bhutan or the Chumbi valley. In July 1998, there was an

unconfirmed report from Khedum village (c. 2,000 m), in Lachung valley of a similar animal.

On June 13, 1999, Mr. Bishnu Kumar Sharma, a daily wager of Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary, east Sikkim on information from local people, had a glimpse of an unfamiliar large mammal at the 15 Mile Police Checkpost, Kyongnosla (c. 3,000 m) beside the Rongchu river. The animal was c. 250 m from the river near the department's plant nursery belonging to the Environment and Pollution Control (EPC) division. Due to dense fog, he could not see the animal clearly. The next day, local people saw the animal return to the area at around 1650 hrs. It came near the bridge, but returned towards the nursery.

On June 15, 1999, at c. 1300 hrs, this animal came once again to the same area and was seen grazing for nearly 40 minutes. Then it actually crossed the river through the surging water and came towards the road. Apprehensively, Bishnu approached almost 15-20 m close to the unfamiliar animal, but could not identify it. It went back by the same trail. Bishnu returned and sent a wireless message to Gangtok.

On June 16, 1999, Mr. C. Lachungpa reached the site at around 0600 hrs. He identified the site as part of Menla Reserve Forest, which is contiguous with Menmoitso forest further east, extending to the Pangolakha range separating Sikkim from Bhutan. At around 1230 hrs, he could go close enough to the animal to take photographs. He had with him Prater's 'THE BOOK OF INDIAN ANIMALS' and immediately identified it as an adult male Mishmi takin *Budorcas taxicolor*, its description matching perfectly with the 'golden-yellow colour merging into dark brown or black on the flanks and quarters'. The animal was unusually well built and seemed to be interested in a herd of domestic cattle further down the road. He watched it rubbing its horns against a *Rhododendron* bush, nearly uprooting it. It then turned to climb up to the base of an

Abies densa, and slept under the tree in full view of the crowd of onlookers for two hours.

On waking and sensing human presence it wandered away, grazing and browsing on nearby bushes, sometimes going out of view. As Mr. Lachungpa and Bishnu changed positions and hid themselves, the takin appeared again on the trail, halted after 4-5 steps, turned to the slushy area near the riverbed and tried to cross the stream further down from the earlier spot. The takin then came to a freshly eroded debris slide and walked up it before seeing the two men. It then climbed up to the bushes and watched aggressively before resuming grazing. Mr. Lachungpa and Bishnu took more photographs.

The weather changed to a cloudy drizzle and the takin was last seen walking into the forest towards a ridge at around 1500 hrs. The local people, police and army personnel were told to watch its movements. On the night of June 19, 1999, the takin finally crossed over and headed up along the western flank of the Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary. On June 22, it was reportedly seen going further north towards Lagyap forest, presumably towards its old haunts near Lachung.

However, in less than a week, the migrant graziers began reporting harassment by the takin. It had taken to wandering around the three small livestock camps, attempting to mate with the cows and female yaks (called 'chaunri') and scaring away their horses. Three wildlife staff of Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary, Kalusingh Rai, Jeevan Rai and M.B. Pradhan, had begun patrolling the area to keep track of its movements. On July 23, 1999, they suddenly came upon the takin which promptly charged at them and chased them up a rhododendron branch and on to a big 'saur' (*Betula* sp.) tree. The takin remained at the foot of the tree for some time before moving off.

On August 5, 1999, I visited the area in connection with a study of grazing patterns in the sanctuary along with the three staff and driver Ramesh Tamang. We went up the old helipad

road for about 4 km before stopping off to visit the first *goth* or livestock camp. There we saw a pregnant cow with both forelimbs sprained or broken, caused by the takin's attempted mating. She was unable even to stand.

Climbing up towards the temporary shed of the second *goth*, we were alerted by shouts behind us. The takin against the skyline less than 100 m away was slowly and unhurriedly lumbering down towards us. Due to the earlier encounter, our staff was in favour of running away when the animal reached a close 30 m, separated from us only by a small stream. The takin, however, walked down its daily route towards the *goth* and its indignant owner standing outside waving his arms. The animal stood watching him for a few moments before crossing the stream to our side and moving away further downwards.

Nothing seemed to really disturb the animal and it was unnatural to see that the takin had no fear at all of man. Two days later, on August 7, 1999, the takin gored to death the shepherd of the third *goth*. His grandson, who escaped, ran to inform the checkpost police and our staff. They returned to see the body and shreds of clothing in the surrounding rhododendron bushes. The grandson informed us that the old man had been poaching monal and blood pheasants in the sanctuary and harassing the takin, which had attached itself to his flock of sheep. That day they had suddenly encountered the animal, only to be charged by it, and being the younger of the two, the grandson had managed to run away.

This is the first time that the old reports could be verified and with photographic proof. The takin, which is protected in India under

Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, as amended up to 1993, does occur in Sikkim. As of now, all the three goat-antelopes in India, i.e. the goral, serow and takin can be said to be found in Sikkim.

Perhaps separated from its herd, this is the same solitary takin isolated on this side of the Chola Range that has been sighted over the years. In fact, the forests ran almost contiguous to north Sikkim along the entire flank of the famed Chumbi Valley (now in Tibet) starting from the Chola range which forms the eastern boundary of Sikkim. This is also the route used by the tiger *Panthera tigris* to travel up to Lachung and Yumthang in north Sikkim up to five decades ago and as recently as November 29, 1998, when an adult male tiger's pugmarks were lifted from the same Lagyap Reserve Forest above Gangtok by Mr. C. Lachungpa. Hence, this sighting of the takin in Sikkim proves a definite westward extension of its range, adding yet another endangered species to the already threatened faunal diversity of Sikkim.

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3. FIRST RECORD OF OCCURRENCE OF ALBINO CRESTLESS HIMALAYAN PORCUPINE *HYSTRIX BRACHYURA* LINNAEUS, 1758 (RODENTIA : HYSTRICIDAE) IN INDIA

While examining the skins of porcupines 1792; crestless Himalayan porcupine *Hystrix*
 [Indian crested porcupine *Hystrix indica* Kerr, *brachyura* Linnaeus, 1758; brush-tailed